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DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Box 3650

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Professor Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
Stanford University School of Genetics
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Dear Professor Lederberg;

I am so very pleased that you found time to read and think about my essay on reduction. I have been away from Yale recently and I only just received your note and the reprints.

I am especially happy to have the Haldane article ("In Defense of Genetics"). He reinforces my own idea that the "over-idealization" (as you put it) of "theoretical" entities (like the gene) is less a timeless philosophical position than a temporary phase in the development of a theory or discipline. This tendency to idealization seems to be justifiable only in the short period of time when the material basis of the theoretical entity actually is in question. Haldane, I take it, wanted to point out that idealization was, by the early forties, over-idealization and no longer appropriate given what was known about the genes and their function. (Naturally Haldane, as a Marxist, gleefully scores this victory for materialism.)

Although it only shows in the longer version of the article that I sent you, I had read and used your Nobel lecture in coming to the "conclusion" state in the first sentence of my paper -- that doubts about the "ontological status" of classical genes have now, profitably, been laid to rest. I plan to write a book on reduction, extending and elaborating some of the ideas in my article. I would very much like to talk to you about this when you get to Rockefeller. I'll write again in the fall.

Needless to say, I am encouraged by your interest; I seem to spend a great deal of time explaining to philosophers why it is necessary to look at the history of scientific developments before making any claims about the "nature" of science. So again, thank you.

Cordially,

Nancy Maull
Nancy Maull

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